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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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19 February 1967

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

South Vietnamese forces participating in a coordinated allied operation designed to drive elements of two Communist divisions away from the heavily populated coastal region of Quang Ngai Province engaged in heavy combat over the weekend. There are indications that Premier Ky is increasingly determined to emerge as the military's candidate for president in the future South Vietnamese Government.

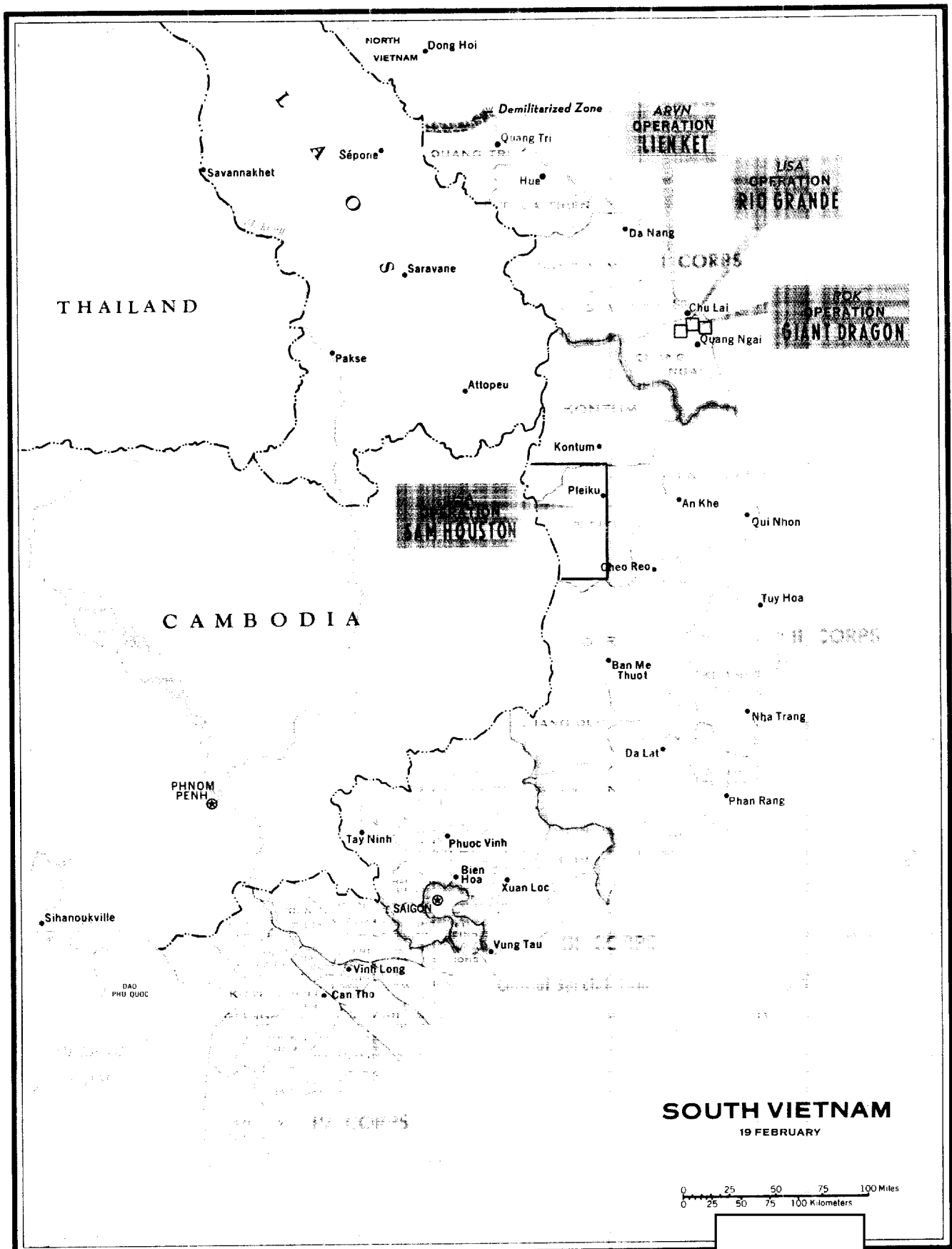
I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
South Vietnamese forces participating in a coordinated allied operation in Quang Ngai Province engaged in heavy combat over the weekend (Paras. 1-2). South Vietnamese forces reported other heavy contact throughout the country (Paras. 3-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Constituent Assembly has begun debate on the executive branch, approving a minimum age of 35 for the future president (Paras. 1-3). There are increasing signs of Premier's Ky's determination to become the military's candidate for president, as well as of civilian interest in the military's future role (Paras. 4-9). Y-Bham, montagnard autonomy leader, is again showing interest in a meeting with government officials in the highlands (Para. 10).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi has condemned Thai counterinsurgency operations in northeast Thailand as "persecution" of Vietnamese residents in that region (Paras. 1-2).



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A large-scale allied campaign to drive elements of two North Vietnamese/Viet Cong divisions out of the heavily populated coastal lowlands of Quang Ngai Province into the inland mountains has resulted in some heavy action over the weekend. The operations, which include U.S., South Vietnamese, and ROK forces, cover an area of some 250 square miles.

2. A South Vietnamese airborne battalion participating in Operation LIEN KET 81 came into contact with an estimated enemy battalion at dawn on 19 February in an area ten miles west-northwest of Quang Ngai city. Latest reports on the battle, which is continuing after some ten hours of bloody fighting, show 20 South Vietnamese soldiers killed and 79 wounded as against 196 enemy killed (US body count). A large number of Communist crew-served weapons were captured along with some 56 individual weapons. Seven battalions of South Vietnamese troops are participating in LIEN KET 81 which began on 18 February. This search-and-destroy operation is being coordinated with South Korean Marine Operation GIANT DRAGON and US Marine Operation RIO GRANDE.

Other South Vietnamese Offensive Activity

3. South Vietnamese forces reported three other sharp engagements in widely scattered parts of the country over the weekend. In one of these an ARVN Ranger battalion engaged an estimated enemy battalion for five hours on 18 February about four miles north of Hue. Friendly losses in this clash were nine killed and 16 wounded including two US advisers. Enemy losses are unknown.

4. In northernmost Quang Tri Province, about five miles northeast of Quang Tri City, another South Vietnamese battalion engaged an enemy force of unknown size on 18 February. South Vietnamese losses in this seven-hour contact were 15 killed

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and 45 wounded, including five killed and seven wounded as a result of friendly artillery short rounds. Known enemy losses are one killed.

5. Three South Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) companies engaged two enemy companies on 19 February about 73 miles north-north-east of Saigon. The South Vietnamese forces received heavy mortar, automatic weapons and small-arms fire. Friendly casualties in this encounter were two killed and 29 wounded. Enemy losses are unknown although a forward air controller reported sighting 20 enemy bodies on the ground.

Operation SAM HOUSTON

6. The heavy contact which has been reported for the last several days in this border reconnaissance and surveillance operation tapered off somewhat over the weekend. Five US infantry battalions--four from the 4th Infantry Division and one from the 25th Infantry Division--have been participating since 31 December in SAM HOUSTON. Cumulative casualty totals to date are: 64 US killed and 143 wounded as against 226 VC/NVA soldiers killed.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Constituent Assembly, in sessions on 16, 17, and 18 February, completed its work on the legislative chapter of the constitution and began discussions on the executive branch.

2. The assembly agreed to transfer from the legislative to the executive chapter an article requiring the legislature's approval of executive appointments in the diplomatic, judicial, and military fields. The remainder of its final debate on the legislative branch concerned the procedures for enacting legislation. Some deputies--notably those representing the Revolutionary Dai Viet party--argued that primacy in the legislative process be given the lower house since the manner of electing the senate would make it more susceptible to presidential influence. As approved, the article reflects some compromise, giving the lower house priority in law-making, but allowing the upper house to retain a significant voice. There does not appear to be a clear-cut presidential power of veto; the president may "request" assembly reconsideration of all or part of a bill, which then requires approval by an absolute majority of both houses, meeting jointly, to become law.

3. Those sections of the executive chapter approved so far by the assembly concern primarily the terms of office, qualifications, and procedures for the election of the president and vice president. There was considerable controversy over Article 52 on qualifications, stemming in part from a thinly veiled effort by southern-oriented deputies and some Dai Viets to eliminate Premier Ky as a candidate through a presidential minimum age limit of 40. The article was finally approved, by a vote of 61 to 22, with the minimum age set at 35.

Presidential Race

4. There are signs that Premier Ky is becoming increasingly determined to emerge as the military's

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candidate for president in the future government. As one means of boosting his candidacy, Ky evidently hopes this spring to visit the US where he has been invited to address the Overseas Press Club.

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Minister of Information Nguyen Bao Tri stated on 15 February that, although the military would run either Ky or Thieu, there are a number of high-level officers in the armed forces who feel Thieu should have first priority.

7. Vo Long Trieu, a prominent southern lay Catholic who resigned from Ky's cabinet last fall, recently voiced his concern to embassy officers that the presidential campaign might destroy military unity. Trieu commented that Ky and Thieu were now "eyeing each other like a pair of fighting cocks before combat," but said he personally felt that Ky would eventually withdraw. He observed, however, that Thieu had told one assemblyman that he would withdraw in Ky's favor if a military split seemed likely.

8. Vo Long Trieu implied that he hoped Ky could be prevailed upon to team up, possibly as premier, with civilian candidate Tran Van Huong, for whom Trieu is now acting as campaign manager. Trieu claimed that there was considerable support

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for Huong among southern regionalist, Catholics, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD), the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, splinter Hoa Hao groups, ethnic Khmers, and some of the civil service and southern military. He claimed that the central Vietnamese Buddhists would not oppose Huong;

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The embassy is attempting to check Trieu's claims, although it feels that he is undoubtedly exaggerating Huong's support.

Directorate Pressure on the Assembly

9.

both Ky and Thieu earlier this month attempted to put pressure on for greater cooperation with the Directorate's views of the constitution. Ky's major concern was that he not be "defeated in the first round" of the presidential contest by a constitutional age requirement of 40, while Thieu stressed opposition to a provision for the election of province chiefs. Thieu reportedly also suggested the creation under the constitution of a military advisory board, warning that if there were not adequate safeguards to assure governmental stability, the military would one day have to resume power.

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Tribal Developments

10. Y-Bham Enoul, leader of the montagnard autonomy movement FULRO, has sent word to government officials in II Corps that he still desires a meeting to discuss his possible exile in Thailand and broader questions of government-montagnard relations. Two couriers, who returned from Y-Bham's place of refuge in the Cambodian border area, attributed his failure to appear at a scheduled meeting in late January to continued suspicion of government intentions and fear of Viet Cong forces in the highland area.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi has condemned the Thai government's increasingly aggressive counterinsurgency operations against Communists in northeast Thailand as a campaign of "persecution" of Vietnamese residing in that region. A statement by a spokesman of the DRV Foreign Ministry, broadcast on 19 February, denounced the Thai government's "inhuman acts against Vietnamese nationals," demanded that such actions be stopped, and that the government guarantee the property and rights of the Vietnamese residents. The spokesman warned that Thai authorities would be held "fully responsible" for all consequences arising from their "wrongdoings," but raised no specific threat of retaliation.

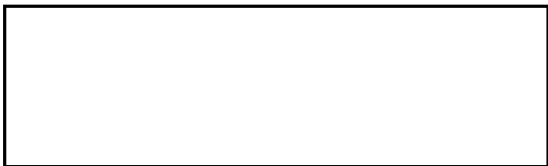
2. Although the current Thai counterinsurgency operations have not been directed against Vietnamese, they have undoubtedly involved some of the approximately 40,000 Vietnamese refugees in northeast Thailand whose sympathies are with North Vietnam and who have been a center of Communist agitation under direction from the DRV. While Hanoi's defense of this overseas element was predictable, it appears that such statements may be part of a larger propaganda campaign to dramatize Thailand's cooperation with the US in the Vietnamese war. The Foreign Ministry spokesman pointed out that the acts of "persecution" took place at a time when 30,000 US troops were in Thailand and when the possibility of the use of Thai air bases for B-52s was being raised. Moreover, since mid-January, Hanoi has issued a series of public statements protesting US involvement in Thailand and has also published a book which allegedly documents US-Thai collusion in the war.

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